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ABSTRACT

Although historically the number of men in management has outnumbered women, the number of women is increasing. However, attitudes in general still presume that men are more competent for managerial roles than are women. The purpose of this study was to examine how business and management students view women's personal attributes for management; the extent to which sex-role stereotypes influence students' attitudes toward women managers; and the extent to which students' attitudes toward women in management mirror those of students in the 1960s and 1970s, which could be summed up in the phrase, "think manager, think male." During the academic year of 1986-87, students (N=119) in a college of business at an urban, commuter university completed a questionnaire in which they identified skills they considered requisite to managerial success and indicated their perceptions as to selected behavioral components were more typical of female managers, male managers, managers in general, or neither male nor female mangers. Students also indicated their preference for a male or female manager and perceptions of their own managers. In general, findings suggest favorable attitudes toward women by students and less observable sex-typing of the managerial roles as masculine. The majority of students did not perceive women as unsuitable for managerial jobs. (ABL)

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# Women In Management: Some Yesterday, More Today

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Running Head: Women In Management

**Women In Management: Some Yesterday, More Today**

Although men have historically outnumbered women in management by approximately five to one, the number of women holding managerial positions has increased in excess of 150 percent (Harvard Business Review, 1985). Moreover, labor statistics reveal that between 1983 and 1987 the percentage of women holding managerial/professional positions had increased by 30 percent (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1987). Women have made progress in management but have been beset by sex-role stereotypes that have had a most pervasive influence on attitudes toward their proclivity for success in this male-dominated profession. Women's ascent to the top of corporate America, to say the least, has been long, winding and rocky...

Despite stricter anti-discrimination laws, the increase in the number of MBA's awarded to women, women's broader career aspirations, and the raised consciousness of men and women, attitudes in general still presume that men are more competent for managerial roles than are women. Needless to say, this presumption becomes more intense when race is a variable. The number of Black female managers has not kept pace with that of White females.

The influence of sex role stereotypes on the perceptions of and attitudes toward female managers has been documented by numerous researchers (Schein, 1975; Terborg, 1977; Zellman, 1976). For example, some earlier studies attempted to ferret out specific attributes which were believed to be requisite to managerial success, and women were seen as not possessing these attributes (Harvard Business Review, 1965; Hennig, 1970; Reif, Newstrom, & Monczka, 1975; Schein, 1976). These findings notwithstanding, women have managed to find their way into managerial ranks. They have done so both by penetrating and ignoring well-entrenched "old boy" networks, and learning to play the same games their male counterparts play to navigate their way up the corporate ladder. Moreover, in the process women seem to have brought with them deep-seated sex role stereotypes---nurturing, gentleness and passivity.

Considering women's gains and successes in management, one might surmise that long-term behavioral characteristics associated with effective or successful managers such as independence, objectivity and competitiveness, which fueled the belief that men were more suited to managerial roles than women, may have been a myth. Myth or fact, there is a growing body of literature which suggests that the attributes necessary for managerial success and effectiveness

are not sex-specific or gender-based, but are a blend of attributes---some characteristically female and others characteristically male (Berryman-Fink, 1985; Catalyst, 1987; Sargent, 1987). Although some of the early research on women in management pointed in this direction, little success was made in altering perceptions and attitudes on the subject (Reif, Newstrom, & Monczka, 1975; Bigoness, 1976; Schein, 1976; Terborg, 1977; Brown, 1979; Donnell & Hall, 1980). Reif, Newstrom, & Monczka, (1975), for example, citing findings of the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation's "Human Engineering Laboratory," proposed that the differences between men and women are not significant enough to support the thesis that women cannot succeed in the managerial role. These authors cite the following Johnson O'Connor findings to support their view:

> The aptitudes which seem to underlie successful management are: objective personality, abstract visualization, and high English vocabulary. Equal numbers of men and women possess objective personality and high vocabulary. More women than men have abstract visualization. The ratios are three women in four; one man in two. Theoretically at least, there ought to be more women in management than men.
>
> (Reif, Newstrom, & Monczka,1975:73)

The idea of success in management being correlated with managers who possess and are capable of displaying a combination of characteristically male and female traits has been

conceptualized as the "androgynous manager" (Sargent, Stupak, & Stupak, 1987). The fact that the number of women in management is steadily increasing seems to suggest that the organizational culture of the corporate world is possibly becoming more androgynous or flexible---utilizing the talents of men and women in corporate decision-making. This posture on the part of corporate America recognizes that men and women are different but neither is necessarily born with a propensity to be a better manager than the other. However, women do enter the corporate world somewhat "handicapped" when compared to men. They lack long-term experience in mid-to-senior-level positions (Raynolds, 1987) due to being passed over, by their male bosses, for their male counterparts, and because of time out for childbearing and childrearing.

Secondly, since women's earliest participation in the labor force they have been (and still are to a great extent) concentrated in lower-level support-type occupations such as secretarial (99%), clerical (95%), bookkeepers (92%), and receptionists (97%) (U.S. Statistical Abstract, 1987). This heavy concentration of women at the lower-end of the dead-end occupational ladder, typically characterized as the "female ghetto," represents a trend of occupational sex-typing that has effectively limited the number of women

entering traditionally male-dominated professions. This is particularly true of management.

Despite the apparent influence, past and present, of sex-role stereotypes on the entry and advancement of women in management, current statistics suggest that attitudes toward women have changed, and/or organizational norms have become more flexible to allow women entry and advancement in the corporate hierarchy. If this is true, one should be able to observe similar changes in the attitudes of business and corporate leaders of the future: students.

The purpose of this study was to examine how business and management students view women's personal attributes for management; the extent to which sex-role stereotypes influence students' attitudes toward women managers; and the extent to which students' attitudes in the eighties, toward women in management, mirror those of students in the sixties and seventies---"think manager, think male."

## Methodology

During the academic year of 1986-87, 180 students in the College of Business and Management at an urban, commuter university in the midwest were administered a written questionnaire which was developed and piloted for this study. The questionnaire included open- and closed-end questions.

One hundred and nineteen questionnaires were usable, 48 males and 71 females. The average age of the sample ranged from 21 to 25 years of age (55 percent). Seventy-five percent of the 119 students were white, with 86 percent employed full-time. The median years of experience in their current position was 1-3 years. Twelve percent of the students reported being unemployed because they were full-time students. Among the students who were full-time workers, 40 percent were in clerical and sales occupations, and 29 percent were in managerial/professional and technical occupations.

## Results

Respondents were asked to identify five skills they considered requisite to managerial success. Their responses were as follows:

1) Communication Skills (44 percent of the sample)
2) Intelligence (38 percent of the sample)
3) Technical Skills (35 percent of the sample)
4) Interpersonal Skills (32 percent of the sample)
5) Motivation to Manage (25 percent of the sample)

Table 1 presents respondents' perceptions of whether selected behavioral characteristics are more typical of female managers, male managers, managers in general, or neither male nor female managers. The data reveal that respondents perceived the majority of these selected characteristics as typical of managers in general. A comparison of the four categories indicates that two behavioral characteristics were ascribed as typical of women managers: nit-picky (37 percent) and petty (35 percent), by a majority of the students. These characteristics were viewed as typical of male managers only 12 and 10 percent of the time respectively. Five behavioral characteristics ascribed as typical of male managers by the sample were: dominant (52 percent), emotional control (46 percent), powerful (54 percent), risk-taker (52 percent), and too aggressive (36 percent). The percentage of respondents ascribing these same characteristics to women managers was significantly lower.

Responses to whether students preferred a male or female boss indicated a majority (66 percent) of the sample had "no preference" while 21 percent preferred a male boss.

Table 1

Students Attitudes Toward Stereotypic Behavioral Characteristics of Managers

| Behavioral Characteristics: | Typically Female | | Typically Male | | Managers In General | | DNA Either | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Assertive | 18 | 15 | 38 | 32 | 57 | 48 | 6 | 5 |
| (Too) Aggressive | 30 | 25 | 43 | 36 | 22 | 18 | 24 | 20 |
| Analytical | 16 | 13 | 29 | 24 | 60 | 50 | 13 | 11 |
| Aggressive | 21 | 18 | 32 | 27 | 55 | 46 | 10 | 8 |
| Ambitious | 19 | 16 | 22 | 18 | 71 | 60 | 7 | 6 |
| Ability to Lead | 8 | 7 | 25 | 21 | 77 | 65 | 9 | 8 |
| Career-Oriented | 17 | 14 | 25 | 21 | 73 | 61 | 4 | 3 |
| Charisma | 25 | 21 | 22 | 18 | 50 | 42 | 22 | 18 |
| Competency | 11 | 9 | 11 | 9 | 86 | 72 | 11 | 9 |
| Competitive | 19 | 16 | 30 | 25 | 61 | 51 | 9 | 8 |
| Dominant | 16 | 13 | 62 | 52 | 32 | 27 | 9 | 8 |
| Decisive | 11 | 9 | 31 | 26 | 69 | 58 | 8 | 7 |
| Detail-Oriented | 42 | 35 | 14 | 12 | 52 | 44 | 11 | 9 |
| Emotional Control | 13 | 11 | 55 | 46 | 37 | 31 | 14 | 12 |
| High Self-Esteem | 15 | 13 | 29 | 24 | 62 | 52 | 13 | 11 |
| Highly Intelligent | 12 | 10 | 16 | 13 | 75 | 63 | 16 | 13 |
| Helpful | 29 | 24 | 5 | 4 | 77 | 65 | 8 | 7 |
| Intuitive | 31 | 26 | 12 | 10 | 54 | 45 | 22 | 18 |
| Influential Leader | 14 | 12 | 33 | 28 | 59 | 50 | 13 | 11 |
| Insightful | 27 | 23 | 10 | 8 | 59 | 50 | 23 | 19 |
| Indecisive | 24 | 20 | 8 | 7 | 33 | 28 | 54 | 45 |
| Nit-Picky | 44 | 37 | 14 | 12 | 33 | 28 | 28 | 24 |
| Petty | 42 | 35 | 12 | 10 | 24 | 20 | 41 | 34 |
| Prone to Fantasize | 32 | 27 | 13 | 11 | 26 | 22 | 48 | 40 |
| Persuasive | 26 | 22 | 35 | 29 | 46 | 39 | 12 | 10 |
| People's Person | 36 | 30 | 23 | 19 | 42 | 35 | 18 | 15 |
| Power Hungry | 16 | 13 | 55 | 46 | 27 | 23 | 21 | 18 |
| Powerful | 7 | 6 | 64 | 54 | 36 | 30 | 12 | 10 |
| Perceptive | 30 | 25 | 6 | 5 | 72 | 61 | 11 | 9 |
| Risk-Taker | 10 | 8 | 62 | 52 | 34 | 28.5 | 13 | 11 |
| Responsible | 13 | 11 | 11 | 9 | 87 | 73 | 8 | 7 |
| Supportive | 33 | 28 | 8 | 7 | 71 | 60 | 7 | 6 |
| Sound Judgement | 10 | 8 | 23 | 19 | 76 | 64 | 9 | 8 |
| Self-Confident | 10 | 8 | 30 | 25 | 69 | 58 | 10 | 8 |
| Stabilizer | 16 | 13 | 27 | 23 | 55 | 46 | 21 | 18 |
| Understanding | 48 | 40 | 9 | 8 | 53 | 45 | 9 | 8 |
| Unbiased | 18 | 15 | 23 | 19 | 39 | 33 | 39 | 33 |
| Well-Qualified | 13 | 11 | 13 | 11 | 83 | 70 | 10 | 8 |

(N= 119)

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of managerial strengths and weaknesses as observed in their own bosses. According to the responses, the following behaviors were predominant examples of managerial weakness:

| | |
|---|---|
| Conservative | Impulsive |
| Hostile | Poor Communication Skills |
| Indecisive | Superiority Attitude |
| Incompetent | Too Emotional |
| Impatient | Not Aggressive |
| Disorganized | |

Behaviors characterized as managerial strengths were reported as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Aggressiveness | Fairness |
| Amiable | Humanitarian |
| Competence | Organizer |
| Good Communication Skills | Good Planning Skills |
| Diplomacy | |

The extent to which respondents believed that the gender of a manager is an indicator of suitability for the job was indicated by the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the three general statements listed in Table 3.

Table 2

Student's Perceptions of Managerial Strengths and Weaknesses

| Strengths | Frequency | Weaknesses | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Assertiveness | 5 | Apolitical | 1 |
| Aggressive | 1 | Biased Attitude | 4 |
| Amiable | 5 | Conservative | 6 |
| Competence | 17 | Chauvinistic Attitude | 2 |
| (Good) Communication Skills | 6 | Hostile | 10 |
| Delegates Responsibility | 1 | Indecisive | 10 |
| Diplomacy | 9 | Inferiority Complex | 1 |
| Directness | 2 | Incompetent | 10 |
| Diligent | 1 | Inflexible | 3 |
| Empathetic | 1 | Impatient | 6 |
| Flexibility | 3 | Impulsive | 6 |
| Fairness | 5 | Low Profile | 3 |
| Honesty | 1 | Manipulative | 2 |
| Humanitarian | 5 | Poor Communication Skills | 9 |
| Interpersonal Skills | 2 | Poor Interpersonal Skills | 4 |
| Innovativeness | 2 | Superiority Attitude | 6 |
| Loyalty | 1 | Sexist Attitude | 1 |
| Leadership Skills | 3 | Slow (Mentally) | 1 |
| Motivated | 2 | Style of Dress | 1 |
| Organizer | 5 | Too Brash | 5 |
| Practical | 1 | Too Emotional | 6 |
| Praises Others | 1 | Unsupportive | 1 |
| (Good) Planning Skills | 7 | Unaggressive | 7 |
| Selflessness | 1 | Unassertive | 1 |
| Supportiveness | 1 | Unorganized | 9 |
| Statistical Skills | 1 | Wasteful | 2 |
| Teacher | 1 | | |
| Team Player | 2 | | |

Table 3

Students Responses to Statements on Managerial Suitability According to Gender

| | SA | | A | | D | | SD | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| 1. Men in general are more qualified for management jobs than women in general. | 7 | 6 | 25 | 21 | 56 | 47 | 31 | 26 |
| 2. Women in general are just as capable of succeeding in management jobs as men in general. | 55 | 46 | 52 | 44 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 |
| 3. When I think manager, I think male. | 57 | 48 | 37 | 31 | 19 | 16 | 6 | 5 |

NOTE: SA= Strongly Agree; A= Agree; D= Disagree; SD= Strongly Disagree

## Discussion

In this study business and management students' perceptions of personal attributes considered requisite to managerial success and the extent to which sex role stereotypes influenced their perceptions of women managers were examined. In general, findings suggest favorable attitudes toward women by these students and less observable

sex-typing of the managerial roles as masculine. Unlike some earlier studies in which students were subjects, the majority of the students in this study do not perceive women as unsuitable for managerial jobs. Responses belie the myth that behavioral attributes required for managerial success/ effectiveness are more typically ascribed to men than women. Rather, in this sample students perceived attributes such as analytical ability, leadership ability and competence as more typically ascribed to managers in general (regardless of sex). This perception hopefully reflects society's changing attitude toward women and occupational sex typing; and accounts, at least in part, for the increase in the number of women in management today, as well as other professions that have been traditionally male-dominated.

The steady increase in female labor force participation and stricter enforcement of anti-discrimination laws no doubt have lessened some of the historical resistance to women in management, and may account for changes in attitudes toward sex and occupational roles for women. Moreover, working women of the eighties are more experienced and have more savvy than working women of the sixties and seventies. Women's raised consciousness, coupled with their knowledge of anti-discrimination laws and mandated affirmative action goals, have apparently served to make

decisions to pursue management careers easier. The increase in their numbers among managerial ranks perhaps explains the observed absence of sex role stereotyping of women managers in the responses of the students in this study. These students, seeing more and more female managers, regard women's presence in this job capacity as normal. Parenthetically, the concomitant decrease in male labor force participation attests to this supposition, and possibly foretells even more of a reduction in the "de-genderfication" of managerial jobs as well as other occupations that have been historically male-dominated.

The majority of the students in this study believed that women in general are just as qualified for management jobs as men in general. The extent to which students believe success in management is not gender-specific supports Sargent, et al's position that successful/effective managers possess and display a cluster of behaviors and skills that enhance competence. This cluster of behaviors and skills is more androgynous than peculiar to either gender. A finding that 66 percent of the respondents in this study indicated "no preference" regarding the gender of their boss, and the observable consistency between perceptions of managerial strengths and requisite behavioral characteristics of managers, reinforce the need for

continued emphasis on research that codifies such behavioral clusters.

Apparently women who are succeeding in management are doing something right. Perhaps the personal attributes they possess and display correlate with competence---a cluster of behaviors and skills---and competence is not sex-specific. For example, students' responses to the value of communication skills, interpersonal skills and intelligence in managers corroborate findings of previous studies (Knowles & Moore, 1970; Reif, Newstrom, & Monczka, 1975) which proposed a de-emphasis of generalized traits in managers and more emphasis on objective criteria, such as objective personality and interpersonal skills.

Empirical research designed to identify and codify objective criteria that facilitate success in managerial roles, would further enhance women's status in management and other traditionally male-dominated professions. The fact that 48 percent of the sample in this study reported: "When I think manager, I think male," underscores this need.

Despite the fact that respondents' perceptions did not, in general, reflect sex-typing of the managerial role, it is significant that almost half of them think of men when they think of managers. Perhaps this phenomenon reflects

reality---"when they see corporate America, they see more males than females"! Unfortunately, selection and promotion decisions in corporate America remain the domain of males who, for the most part, are still not comfortable with women in the Executive Suite. The few women heading Fortune 500 Companies is an aberration. The "presumption" that men are more competent than women overshadows positive changes in attitudes toward women managers, and climbing to the top of corporate America for women **REMAINS AN UPHILL BATTLE!**

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